

Western MRS Meeting Notes
April 24, 2006
Hendersonville Public Library, Hendersonville

Counties Present: Catawba, Cleveland, Haywood, Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Yancey.

Introduction

News from Raleigh

Practice Notes Survey

Family Centered Practice

Where are we?

Where are we going?

How do we get there?

Upcoming Meetings

News from Raleigh

- Patrick Betancourt from Franklin County will be taking Tony Troop's old position starting May 3rd.
- New policy consultant in Hope's old position. Rick Zeckman
- Responsible Individual List will be starting May 1st. When someone is substantiated for abuse or serious neglect they will have the option to appeal. Just got it through the Rules Committee so the letter will be coming out this week.
 - This will start May 1, but the automation will not be complete until June 15th. If you have someone to add to the responsible individual lists paper forms will have to be mailed to the Black Mountain Office. Please pay particular attention to the Dear County Director list.
 - Also, this means that data entry people will not see the fields on the screen that are on the form. Tell them not to freak out. Just enter the rest of the form.

Practice Notes Survey

- John McMann talked a bit about Practice Notes. Funded by the Division, comes out quarterly. Would like to get feedback about the notes with a survey and talking about impressions of the newsletter and how the newsletter can help implement MRS in their counties.
- Handed out a survey and had folks complete it, as well as a list of topics that have been covered in the Notes.
- Asked folks what type of things regarding implementation of MRS would be helpful to them to have in the notes. Or other challenges in their agencies.

- Counties made several requests, which John noted. The topics for each month come from what is timely, sometimes based on these meetings, and the DSS management team.
- Can access the older issues on the website.

Family Centered Practice

How do we keep that front and center? A lot of counties say Oh yeah, we are already family centered. In reality, you were probably as family centered as the old DSS system allowed you to be, but MRS allows a much deeper level of true family centered practice.

Even if you are excited about family centered practice to begin with, when you first start to get overworked it is easier to go back to the old way that you are comfortable with because you are rushed and just need to get the work done.

Over the next several months the Division wants to look at what kind of additional training they need to develop, particularly based on Family Centered Practice.

On a scale from 1-10 (1 is a cop, 10 is the best you could get) where are you?

Haywood

- Do really well on the first visit, and then become a 1. After they start they seem to revert back to the old way of doing things. (This is exactly Holly's point.)

Henderson

- The first visit goes well, it is a struggle to get the collaterals in a family friendly way, but she has seen improvement with reading records.
- Have done well with developing the case plan with the family, not in the social worker's office.
- There is some good close collaboration between some CPS and WF workers, so this is good for families.

Cleveland

- Work First is who was here today and they aren't sure. They know there are a lot of family centered meetings, but not sure.

Polk

- 3 to 4

Transylvania

- Good on the first and then go back to a 1 or 2. They are struggling now with no supervisor.

Rutherford

- Probably at about a 5. Have had a few assessments, and they feel that those have gone well, but they have only had a few and wonder how it will be when they get more.

Yancey

- Middle of the road. Start off strong during the assessment and then it falls by the wayside for case management. Lots of new workers, not all of whom are trained.

Catawba

- Depends on the worker. Some workers a 6, some between a 1 and 2.

What would they like to see that would make people feel that they were more family centered?

Court

- Start off family centered, but then when they get to the court process, become court oriented. The court process prevents them from being family centered. The adjudication prevents flexibility and family centered practices. Need to get the attorneys to be family centered, and judges as well. Folks feel that the judges need it more than the DSS attorneys, but we can reach the attorneys easier.
- Holly recommended that on the local level counties try to educate their attorneys. We are trying to address this on a state level, but the local communication will work better. Counties said that sometimes it is just a matter of some language changes in the documentation. Sometimes feel that court negates the results of some really good family team meetings.

Working with your workers. Have to be family centered with your staff, as if they were a family as well.

- Start out strong, but when the family shows the first sign of resistance, the social workers don't know how to deal with this so they go back to the punitive approach. Have to help the social worker know how to deal with the resistance without going back to the old school approach.
- One worker said that the more family and friends that you can get in the child and family team meetings, the better for the family and the DSS. It helps the family work through their own resistance, often the family and friends will call the family on their own resistance and also if they are not being honest. For example, the Uncle may say to Dad, Get serious, you know you are staying drunk and not doing what you are supposed to. This prevents the DSS from being the bad guy and makes the family own their behavior.
- Not sure exactly how some workers are so much better at getting good attendance at the CFT and some are not so good at it. Holly suggested that possibly the earlier they mention them, the more time the family has to think about it. At first they won't want anyone in their business, but if they have time to chew on it they will probably think about people that they would like to have there with them.

It is possible to have good relationships with families and still hold them accountable. We have all done it. So, how do we do the same things with our co-workers and community partners?

- They have to see successes. Not sure how to get those stories out there.
- Just do it case by case, eventually there will be one that will be a success that someone who was initially resistant will know about and that may change their mind, and then they will talk. It s a gradual thing.

What about Foster Parents. It is hard to get Case Management and Foster Care on board. Some counties seem to do a lot better with this than others.

- It is a part of MAPP, but it has been for years. One county admitted that they changed the presentation of this aspect of MAPP.
- One county has encourages the Foster Parents to come to court if they can. They can read during the other cases, but this will allow them to hear the judge directly and see the biological families.
- Some of the smaller counties the issue is that the Foster Parents grew up with the Biological Parents, so they know them and they already think the biological parents are crazy or something, based on past interaction, don t want to deal with them. They will sometimes do Shared Parenting with some kids, but not with others that they know the parents.
- Meth has scared some Foster Families.

Licensing Kinship Care Homes

- Yancey does a lot of kinship care, and the state wants all Foster Parents to be licensed, but these folks do not want to be licensed, they are just doing this for a short time.
- They do not want to turn their own families in. Don t want to have to go to the class. Opens their home up to the scrutiny of DSS. Lot of kinship people are older. They don t want to go to class, and they feel they are punished for helping their family. We don t ask people to be licensed to have their own biological children, why do we ask aunts or grandparents to be?
- The funding will be a burden on the counties.
- WF perspective is to make parents self sufficient with their household. DSS places children with Grandmother, who does not work with a disability, but Granddad works odd jobs, and they were making it ok without the kids. However, with the additional resources needed to provide for the children, what are Grandparents supposed to do? Kids see the check come in to support them. The kids learn that they don t have to be self sufficient, because they think Grandma doesn t work, Granddad only works when he wants, and we just get a check. They learn what they see.
- Need to make sure that the kinship care social workers are aware of the resources that are available to them even though they are not licensed. They may need help doing the non financial things. Do they know how to do things like get their grandkids in summer camp, and things like that.

- Child only cases have a WF case manager, not a social worker in a lot of counties. May need to start having a social worker, or at least figure out a way to get a little more involved with the kinship care families so that they can manage. Some counties are starting to do home visits with kinship placements.
- Holly shared the idea in the east for having the community to help. There are sometimes many things that are set up for Foster Kids, that can also be used for kinship care if the community realized that there was this group of kids, who are not technically in foster care, but have the same types of needs, and would be in foster care was it not for a family member who was willing to work hard to keep the kids out of care.

Holly went to Haywood and they said they had sent entire staff to family centered training, but they feel that they have gone back to being incident focus. There was an incident where boyfriend spanked a child, it was an assessment, and the family cooperated, but by the end the staff wanted to substantiate. Why? Management was concerned. Seems that when you get busy and backed up, you go back to what is comfortable so that you can get work done faster. They brainstormed ideas of how to keep family centered in focus at all times.

- Managers realized that they had to practice what they preached. They have met every week to talk about how to take care of themselves and their staff.
- Some things that they have talked about is putting signs up in everyone's offices about family centered practice. A bulletin board where you posted a family centered moment. No names on it, just notes people put up about family centered practice moments. (They just had biannual review and it was a positive experience, the best one they have ever had, the attitude of the reviews was very positive.)
- Early in MRS they had an issue with the staffing and the attorney who wanted to know what they had not done things earlier. So they have pulled him into more of their practices, for example, he was a part of the bi-annual review so that he would know what they did.
- When they talk to workers, they will ask, Is that family centered? How could it be (or how could it be more so). Have made forms that have checklists to help them get the procedural things done which gives them more time to think about how to be family centered because they are not focused on Oh my gosh, have I gotten everything done that I needed to??
- When they see caseloads go up they have a blitz and see why those cases are not closing out so that the worker is not carrying 40 cases.
- The big thing they want to do is a retreat with the workers.

What other ideas have folks used?

- Holly suggested posting the principles or partnership.
- Cleveland had someone from UNCW come and do more family centered practice above and beyond what the state provided.
- Catawba also does a blitz, every week. Mainly look at stuck cases, it is the worker's decision of which cases to bring in.
- Shared Bladen's lunch and learns that they do once a month. Get to learn something and also socialize informally with their coworkers.

We need to figure out how we can sustain the progress we have made and also keep supporting each other?

- With gas prices, hard to meet all the time. Look at other resources, list serve, Practice Notes.
- One county looks at case reviews to see if they were done in an MRS way. Supervisors review cases and give feedback to workers from a family centered MRS way, not just a general CPS policy way.

Day Care funding an issue

- Day Care funding is an issue. Because some families are getting day care funding only because CPS is involved, at once the case is closed the funding will go away, so CPS doesn't want to close out.

Other questions that came up:

- Is there some kind of guideline or cheat sheet from the state that gives parameters about the role of Work First?
No, because it will vary from county to county. Holly said that each county needs to discuss and determine this within their county.

Upcoming Meetings

Policy Training

5/9 Rowan Co

5/10 Edgecombe

5/16 Robeson

Monthly Meetings will be talking about System of Care

5/24 McDowell Community College

5/25 Alamance Co

5/26 Wilson Co (DSS)

No Western location for June yet.

6/28 Stanly Co.

6/29 Pitt Co. (Ag Center)

MRS Institute - August week of 21st. In Craven County (New Bern)